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LETTERS FROM THE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE
TO HON. HENRY LAURENS, 1777-1780.

[Continued from the January number.]

[6.]

The 20 november head quarters

Dear Sir

his excellency wrote to Congress some days ago in order to recommend Mr de coigny, actually Major in the french service, who desires to be employed in this with the rank of Lieutenant colonel—after general Washington's speacking for him, any thing from me can be but very weak and even very useless—however I think it my duty, as well as becoming to desire of seeing him employed to let you know, Sir, how interesting it seems to me to have that officer in our cavalry—a good officer of horse is not a short matter to be formed—Mr de coigny enjoyed a fine military reputation in a corps much reputed itself in our army last war—his kind of duty had a great likeness with this of our light dragoons, and g'ral pulaski well convinced how such a man could be useful and to himself and to the advantage of the service expressed me the greatest desire of his being employed and in expecting an answer from Congress took him at his quarters.

I gave you by my last the trouble of sending some supplies to that poor fellow who expects from me since five months.—

as Congress has been kind enough as to except him from the general arrangement I am not in any doubt about his getting a commission in my family.

I am just now going from this place with a detachment under M^r genl greene—I hope my wound w^ont be much hurted—I shall never reproach myself loosing any occasion of doing some thing, as far as it can be for my present situation, or to speak better the inaction I am in. with the greatest affection and esteem I am till the last moment of my life

Dear Sir

Your most obedient servant
the M^{rs} de Lafayette

Endorsed: Marquis delafayette

Rec^d 28 Nov 1777—

[7.]

Addressed: The honble Henry Laurens Esq^r—
President of Congress
York—

White Marsh the 29 november 1777

Dear Sir

how I am obliged to you for the charming parcell of letters I received yesterday All the feeling of your heart will certainly convince you, if you remember in this moment every thing, every body, love or friendship has ever given your soul an attachment for—I found there that my friends of all age and sex were in very good health the 14 july—I found that they keep the remembrance I can wish, of that man who is called in france the american entousiast—I found also that I was lately father of a female child—but nothing about war, and indeed the date is too old for any good niews of that kind—I received your's some days ago with the greatest pleasure, and all your intelligences seem to me so strong that I have no more any doubt or at least very light ones about france being ready to over power proud england under the superiority of her arms—I'l be much obliged to

you if you are so good as to let me know every news you'll hear from my country.

the bearer of my letter Mr de fleury who was in fort miflin, and as he is recommended by his excellency I have nothing more to say but that I am very sensible of his good conduct—

I'll be much obliged to you if you let me know when I can wrait to france—I chuse rather to put my letters in pacquets going from Congress by paquet boats than to send them on board of merchant schips even of armed ones—those paquet boats arrive always very fast and very safe— As I fancy that some of them will go of very soon I wish to know when I must send my pacquets—amongst the other letters I'll inclose one for the first minister where I shall acquaint him that General bourgoigne is going over to england—if war was not declared that advice would be perhaps an inducement to begin real hostilities—I wishoud you would be so good as to tell me what you think about bourgoigne's embarkation and where vessels of transport and provisions will come from

his excellency has been pleased to let you know a very small engagement on the other side of delaware—tho it is very trifling in itself, tho no kind of merit at all can be on the account of the general officer who was by chance with them, however I have had the greatest pleasure to see by my own eyes with what bravery and alacrity a little reconnoitering party of less than three hundred men the half militia has repelled very far with a great loss a body of 350 hessians with field pieces, notwithstanding two british reinforcements and strong ones (for two english captains have been killed there)—general greene who arrives just now acquaints me that besides those above mentioned captains and the killed hessian officer, two captains of the same nation have been wounded—therefore I hope their loss greater than I thought—I was there nothing almost but a witness, but I was a very pleased one in seeing the behaviour of our men.

Mr de fleury received just now the commission of lieutenant colonel, I think he wo'nt go to day to Congress, and I

send this letter by one other occasion—with the most tender sentiments of an eternal affection I have the honor to be

Dear Sir Your most obedient servant
the Mquis de Lafayette

all the letters I receive from frenchmen are full of their gratefulness for your own particular kindness towards them will you be so good as to accept my thanks for them and for myself, and to join here my sincere ones on account of the appointment of Mr de la colombe—my compliments if you please to Mr richard henry lee, Mr Moriss and the other gentlemen of my acquaintance

Endorsed: Marquis delafayette
29 Nov 1777
Rec^d— 5 Decem—

[8.]

Addressed: to
The honorable Mr henry laurens president
of Congress
York town

headquarters the 3^d december

Dear Sir

the bearer is the chevalier de failly lieutenant colonel in our service who has made this campaign under general gates where he deserved his greatest approbation—he is in the french service since toward thirty years and he behaved always there in a manner which do honour to soldiery—his frankness, delicacy, and disinterested zeal for our cause deserves a particular regard—he is now going to congress and he desired me to recommend him to you—I do not see any thing extraordinary or unjust in his wishes, and I must confess that it is a particular pleasure for me to address you french gentlemen worthy of the country they are coming from.

I expect to hear from you about some occasions going to france; I wish heartily you could hear from us about Mr

howe being repulsed in case he would attack us; we had some expectations those first days, but I begin to give up all my pleasant hopes of luring him out of his redoubts.

With the most tender affection and friendship I have the honor to be

dear sir

Your most obedient servant
the Mquis de Lafayette

Endorsed: Marquis delafayette

3^d. Rec^d. 7 Decem

1777

[9]

At the gulph the 14 december 1777

Dear Sir

I advise you to take care for your self in making the least excuse to me, because thousand and thousand will fall immediately upon you, with all the rapidity of a torrent,—and then my heart will indulge itself the repeated and tedious assurances of my gratefulness, which you deserved by this apology of your last letter—but, sir, friendship do not admit such compliments, and, therefore I wish heartily they should be removed from us—I am very well convinced of the immense quantity of businesses which employ all the moments of your life,—give me leave to tell you that you would be quite wrong, if your time was spent in serious occupations as far as to hurt your health and constitution—then the trifling advantage of some hours would certainly prevent you from being useful to your country for months or years on account of sickness and inconveniences attending too hard and tiring occupations—however, tho' troublesome I might be, my confidence is such that I'll apply always to you in the least circumstances, and the president of Congress as well as my friend will receive all my adresses in every occasion—I beg only leave of making two rules between us—the first, that when I schall ask some thing to you improper, unjust, or not becoming with the regulations or in-

terests of your country, the president of Congress will never know any thing of the matter neither take any notice of it—my second rule is that you schall never think yourself obliged to any answer, to any execution of my desires &c. &c. till the moment where your business will leave you in full liberty of doing it. such is the the plan which must be fixed upon among us.

the bearer of the present the chevalier de failly ran a way from you some days ago without any leave, without thinking of his *rendi-vous*, on account of the approach and fighting-like manœuvre of general howe—I assured him that you would excuse such an impolite desertion—he feels the greatest gratefulness for your kind reception—these are the sentiments of all the french gentlemen who have had some occasions of knowing you—I can tell you without compliment that never man acquired the love and confidence of a stranger nation, so far as you are beloved and trust upon by all my country men I know here—I wish the same way should have been taken every where, and every body would have been satisfied with much lesser expense, of Congress and greater advantages on both side.

I received a letter from the viscount de montroy who has the same rank in france as the baron de Kalb, and made the same convention with Mr Silas deane—he seems to me very affronted to have been left when the baron de Kalb was admitted in our Service—this gentleman is one of my countrymen of the most recommendable in this part of the world for his wit, genius, and civil reputation—however Mr lovell told to a french officer that he had wrote a very improper letter to Congress—I hope that you will be so good as to let me know the truth of it.

I am very sensible of the mark of confidence I received from Congress in being appointed to a division of the army—I wish to deserve it by my own and my division's conduct principally when happy occasions may present themselves to us—my tenderest and warmest attachment for our respectable and great general has made myself very desirous

to be at the head of his country men—it is with a great pleasure that I heard a plenty of cloathes and blankets would arrive soon in camp—give me leave to make to you the following reflexion—do'nt you think that as the Northern provinces have been well provided since the beggining of the war (and indeed I saw yet yesterday large parcels of goods distributed among them) some more attention schould be payed to our poor naked virginians who have always fought without any ressource, alwais in the oppened field, and under general washington? I wishoud that a great plenty of coats could arrive together in camp, and not parcel by parcel, in order to distribute them at once and make some uniformity in the several regiments which is a thing much more important than it seems to be—when a small quantity is brought here we are obliged to attend first to those unhappy wretches theyr nakedness prevents entirely from making any duty, and who expect the moment of perishing by sickness or changing theyr deplorable situation by desertion—of those quite naked fellows incapable of service for want of cloathes, shoes &c. I have many in my division, and I can't express to you how it makes myself uneasy.

I have been acquainted with a very great pleasure of the measures which Congress will take for the sake of this army—first in giving to our officers that consideration, and idea of themselves which is absolutely necessary—Military life is full of labours, dangers, inconveniences of every kind—in the middle of theyr distresses, and sufferings we want to entertain a merry, willing, and alwais ready spirit—but how can you expect that they will go through the hardships of war with that so desirable alacrity, if honor, if even a kind of pride does not sustain them—honor will raise from praises due to bravery and good conduct—do'nt tell never *he has done his duty* men must receive thanks for doing merely that very same duty as well as they ought to be punished when they neglect it—the other point schall be carried on in making the commissions honorable and desirable for every gentleman of whatever fortune he can be—I'l let you know as

my friend that I intend for this purpose to pay to the lieutenants of my division the same politeness and regard which is payed here to generals officers and sometimes refused to a colonel—one other thing very agreeable to me is to hear that the divisions and regiments will be completed this winter by taking them out of militia—it is the only way of getting an army, it is, I dare say, the only way of opposing ourselves to what ever ennemy england can send to us—the same men who are now scatered in the country, plundering the inhabitants, and bold every where but before the ennemy, will make good, fine, disciplined soldiers, under the new strict rules and which I hope, will be established upon a general plan and extenuated upon the best military principles

I received several letters from general connway by which I foresee he will stay in this country—according to that highly pleasant project he spoke of, I believe that you mean some ideas about the east indias—as Mr de cannway has been in garrison in the *isle de france* I desired from him several times some particularities about the matter—that project wants a man at the head of it who by his weight in france could undertake things which would loose a gentleman less firm in that country by his connexions and all our others french prejugas—influence about court is not only necessary he must have some fortune to risk expensive enterprizes—these considerations engaged me to believe that I could be of some use to america if in the same time that I am fighting here, I would induce the french ministry in supporting enterprizes which schall certainly finish by a war between france and england—I have therefore the pleasure to inform you that by Mr de valfort I wrote a long letter to the count de maurepas, whom I desire to consider himself and propose to the King in my name the following project—intrusted with commissions of congress, with very smallest succours (because I represent that in the circumstances america ca'nt make great efforts) I offer myself to engage a part of my fortune in collecting some vessels arms &c. &c. I ask only from the king to order the governors of the french

american islands, and principally this of the isle de france, in the east indias not to put any obstacle to my operations, and even to favour them—then I answer to them that some english establishments (perhaps all) will be destroyed without any expense neither from france neither from america—this project wants to be explained in very long terms what I'll do at our first interview—to be short on the matter I'll tell only to you—first that I employed all the knowledge of this court I can have to make the king and his minister in love with this project—the second that I engaged no body there but myself, that I have promised nothing in the world to them, because I think a plan between both nations must be calculated for their common advantage in it—the third that I selected from all the romanesque of this project, all what it has reasonable and practicable in itself—the fourth that I am certain that in our first conversation you'll find that what I have done and mean to do answers every purpose for the interests of america.

I have wrote by the same occasion to the governor of martinico, a gentleman whom I can depend upon, and I am certain he will do every thing in his power for me—I propose to him the following enterprise—I could make a voyage in these islands for two months in all—and from there I'll take proper measures to fall in the english possessions, destroy the inhabitants, take away the negros &c &c—which operations tho done in my name, upon my credit, and under american colours, would certainly be the cause of a great dispute between france and england, as well as of some advantage for america. I expect answers about those two points, and if they are agreed I shall lay down my projects before congress and submit them to their judgement and instructions. I ask from you, sir, a great secrecy; you can only let them be known to few members of congress you can depend upon as upon yourself. but if some others should be acquainted of it, I foresee indiscretions and bad consequences. In case the above project should take place, and the operations of war should want my presence here, then I'll direct

officers and gentlemen I can depend upon to act under my name, my expenses and my instructions.

You will be perhaps surprised that I did not speak to any body in america about those ideas and undertakings of mine—but, sir, it would not answer any purpose but to let me have some assurances that america is satisfied with my conduct—And tho' agreeable and highly pleasant it could be to me to think that this country believes myself of some use to it, however I want more to serve america and the cause of liberty and mankind than to be thanked for those services. I wishoud therefore to conceal my measures till the moment when favorable answers should make myself able to proceed directly to the execution, and in case of refusals no body should have known any thing of it. but as I see congress ready to engage itself in some undertakings of that kind I thought it my duty to let you know what I have already done by the first opportunity you'l furnish me with I'l explain myself upon a greater scale.

if I had had the pleasure to be better acquainted with Mr john adams or he had applied to me, I would have given him every instruction in my power for his succe's in that country—it seems to me by your letter that some time will be spent in the preparations of his vessel—be so good sir, as to let me know how long you think that time will be, because I'l have my letters ready and I wish to send them as late as possible—I am sorry I have not seen that genteleman—he will have thousand questions made to him about me—thousand particularities will be inquired in on the same subject—I do not know how he will answer—for there he will hear more from me perhaps in two hours, than he ever heard since my arrival for avoiding to him the trouble of answering to thousand about a point he do'nt know much of, make to him a little lesson he will repeat the first day, and after it he must shut the shop, and all those importune questions about a man unknown to him must be over.

I do'nt deserve indeed, sir, any compliment for our little victory of the jersavs. that advantage had (I must confess)

something very clever but it is much more owned to the bravery of my little party than to any disposition or operation on my part. I was there nothing more than a witness

I am indeed very importune to wait so long a letter. you'll find me very troublesome, and I make haste to put an end to it by the short assurance of the eternal friendship I am with

dear sir

Your most obedient servant
the mquis de Lafayette

the chevalier de failly if he obtains the leave of a canadian corps desires very much he could be annexed to my division, and indeed that idea is very pleasing to me

As the french war is not confirmed I begin to conceive some very bad doubts, on this matter. I wish with a great ardour to get clear of them

Endorsed: Marquis delafayette
14 Decem 1777 Rec^d. 18th.

[10.]

Dear Sir

My attachment for your cause, for yourself, for general washington engage me to express freely the sentiments of my heart—you will find perhaps my confidence very importune upon a so delicate point—but it is in the same time a so important one that I want to know if my fears are groundless or if I must give up the flattering hopes which upon this occasion every lover of liberty and mankind had a true right to entertain—I am fully convinced that if any dissension take place in the Congress, in the army, or between the militar and the civil power of this new feeble country, america is lost for ever—what must I think when I hear from every where the party of such a one, this of one other, the northern, the southern interest and all those distinctions between members of a body which can not have any strenght but by the most strictest union—remember, my dear sir, what lord north promised to your most cruel

and tyrannic ennemys, when he foresaw in one of his speeches that dissensions should take place one day or another among the several states the several members of congress, and facilitate the succe's and vengeance of a master who is now as thirsty of your blood as he was before of your liberties and properties—in all the niews papers, in all the conversations, in all the speculations of ministers and powerfull men I have alwaïs heard those two ideas united together,, some members of congress (as we are told) do not agree amongh themselves, therffore america is lost and submitted—heaven has removed till this time from our ennemies the perfect knowledge of great many particularities which strike my eyes, which I see with the greatest concern, but they will know it soon, you are surrounded by secret ennemys, you have thousand among you, some perhaps in Congress itself—if howe should know in this moment our present circumstances, I dare not say what my mind foresees—

it is perfectly clear to every body that Congress is divided in three parts—the first and I wish it can be the more numerous, those virtous citizens, who desire truly happiness succes and freedom to the whole continent, without any base self-interest, without particular ambition, without for any part of that world which they try to make happy—the second part is what is called the southern party, or gates's faction, or miflin's forces, and every other denomination according to the power of the gentlemen who are concerned in it—the third part is the northern faction—those two last were since a long time silently working one against another, but now ready to breake up in open dissenssions—let us consider what has been done since some days.

general gates's succe's have turned all the heads and raised his party to the highest degree—some have been audacious, ungrateful, and foolish enough as to hope it would reflect on general washington's reputation and honor—men indeed to be pitied as well as despised!—they erect themselves absolute judges without having the less idea not only of military knowledge, but even of common sense—genl gates (and

I did not believe that any comparison could be ever made between both) general gates, I say, was in the middle of the woods, expecting an ennemy who could arrive to him by one single road—no danger of being turned by the right or the left—no march to be made without his knowledge—a great superiority of number—it was almost impossible to him not to conquer,—which marches, which movements, what has he done in all to compare him to that hero who at the head of sixteen hundred peasants pursued last winter a strong disciplined army through an open and vast country—to that great general who is born for the salvation of his country and the admiration of the universe—yes, sir, that very same campaign of last winter would do one of the finest part of the life of Cæsar Condé, turenne, and those men whose any soldier can not pronounce the name without an entousiastik adoration—in the last summer obliged to give battle in a plain (,in that moment where the troops are all, and the general almost nothing in comparison of his influence in the course of the campaign) he has been defeated by a superior number, by the discipline by the moral and phisick necessity he was under to loss the first general engagement in open field—the great condé would have been defeated in such circumstances—and yet, if in german town his order of battle (one of the finest I ever saw) had been followed by some general officer whom I will not name perhaps he would have been successfull—there are men who are surprised that he do'nt attack the redoubts because gnl gates has been into some trifling lines—believe me, sir, I am candid and frank, I dare say that I am not quite stranger in the military way, if we go there in our present circumstances we are ruined for ever—consult if you will general portail one of the best and most honest officers upon this continent he will tell you that taking philadelphia is as impossible as to storm the moon—I told to general washington and I repeat to you, if we attack now those redoubts I make very willingly the bargain of coming back with one single arm and the half part of the army, and certainly it would be a very advantage-

ous one—but, sir, all those men who talk of storming the lines of beating gl..howe are stranger to our circumstances, or desirous to engage gl washington in a step where he could fall—believe that upon my word.

however if you should loose that same man, what would become of the american liberty? who could take his place? certainly some body should raise from the earth—for now I do not any body, neither in the south neither in the north, neither gates neither mifflin, neither greene (you see that I put them all without distinction) who could keep an american army for six months—general washington is my friend my tiderest friend it is true, but I assure you that I have not the least partiality in what I wrote to you. for grl gates I consider him, I have a great regard for him, I think he deserves the praises as well as the gratefulness of every one in his country, but I do not bear any comparison with our general.

give me leave to tell you how I am surprised of the little regard pay'd to grl washington in this instance—since some time a board of war has been established and taken in a certain faction to restrain his authority—A distinction has been made between his army and this of general gates—the northern department the commander in chief of the northern troops and so on—gates himself did never give to him any account of his operations and succe's—resolves of congress (and which resolves good god!) are sent every day to stop his operations and push him in very bad ones—and now a major general, inspector general, a kind of superintendent of all the army with about the same rights as du condray could ever desire in the artillerie is sent to him without his participation—he is not acquainted of a word of it till grl counway appears himself—indeed he does not deserve that neglect, I say more that kind of insult—if you could know in what circumstance it happens—what letter had been wrote by the same gentleman—but if general washington has been moderate enough as to keep the silence about this matter I schall imitate him;

I want however to let you know which effects that promotion has made in the army—every brigadier thinks himself affronted to the last degree—all will give their dismissal—what circumstances if the enemy had some knowledge of it—try, my dear sir, to establish some peace in all that confusion, the sooner will be the best, if it would go a degree further great inconveniences should arise congress is not to make use of his authority in this instance—such a step in this moment would be too dangerous—believe me, sir, believe my interest for the cause, for yourself, for gl. washington, this is one of the most important crisis america has ever been in.

general connway is a good and brave officer (and without minding his moral qualities) as he is an excellent major of infanterie, he could be useful for the instruction of our troops—do not believe however that the department of manoeuvres, administration of rgts &c is a very difficult thing, every man who is not stupid and has been six months in a french garrison must be pretty far advanced in that so easy knowledge but certainly no body can deny that kind of merit to Mr de connway to a very high degree.

I am sorry that Congress is so far advanced—it will be disagreeable to be obliged to go back—it will be very dangerous to proceed—I admire in this occasion the perfect silence and moderation of our commander in chief.

I know very well your sentiments upon those matters—however I desire to have a line from you upon these subjects—I promise you the same secrecy and care of burning your letters which I beg for the present—explain me, sir, by what chance so little regard is pay'd to general washington—I am very certain you do not approve such a neglect—I am not in any doubt about your sentiments for that ungratefulness which some reward that respectable man with—I beg your pardon in being so free, but as I am a friend of peace those dissensions revolt me so much that I could not help myself of mentioning it to you

I have been very sorry to hear how you was under the

tyranic domination of a troublesome goute—slavery in general and so bad one as this should never attend you. fare-well my dear sir and worthy friend, I am with the most tender affection, the most warmest wishes for the liberty happiness of your country, for the union of her sons, the succe's of our cause, and your own satisfaction

Your most obedient servant

the Mquis de Lafayette

Endorsed: Marquis delafayette

Rec^d. 5 January 1778.

[To be continued in the next number of this magazine.]